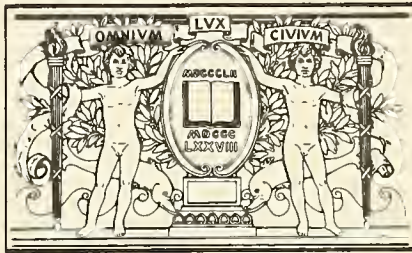


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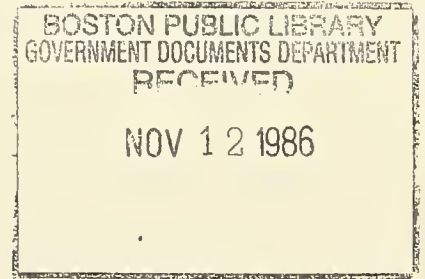




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HISTORIC BURIAL GROUNDS INVENTORY PROJECT

Report for

Phipps Street Burial Ground, Charlestown, Mass.

August 31, 1984

Rosanne Atwood-Humes, Project Supervisor
Carol Szymanski, Yankee Intern

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GENERAL INDEX

- page 1 Report on Phipps Street Burial Ground, Charlestown, Mass.
completed August 31, 1984 by Rosanne Atwood-Humes, Project
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Inventory Forms

GUIDE

The first three pages of the alphabetical index, and the first eight pages of the chronological index, list those gravestones which have no identifying name or date. They may be illegible due to weathering, or may be sunken too deeply to read the inscription.

The index headings refer to the first and last name of the deceased which is inscribed on the gravestone or tomb; the date of death, also recorded on the stone; and the location reference number, which refers back to the inventory form completed for each stone. The inventory forms are arranged in order of inventory, i.e., by the gravestone's location within a section of the burial ground. The reference number consists of the Row, Section, and number within that section; for example, a gravestone numbered 10M-93 would be located in the 10th row of section M, and was the 93rd gravestone inventoried in that section. The importance of an updated map, marking the precise, present locations of the grave markers, and cross-referenced to the inventory forms, cannot be overstated. The sections were assigned letters which correspond to those used on the 1901 City Engineer's map, available from City Hall, or at the Bostonian Society. If future restoration plans include a realignment to the nineteenth century plan, the reference numbers should be easily adapted.

To assist in finding a particular gravestone, the Location List gives the rows and number of grave markers in each row for each section. To find the infamous 10M-93, one would look up Section M, find that Row 10 had stones 92 through 106, so the desired gravestone would be the second one in that row. Again, a revised map would make the process much simpler, but it usually doesn't take too long to find a particular gravestone in the field.

HISTORIC BURIAL GROUNDS INVENTORY PROJECT

Phipps Street Burial Ground, Charlestown, Mass.

The Historic Burial Grounds Inventory Project was initiated in 1983 to collect detailed information on damage and deterioration in Boston's seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century burial grounds as a first step in the development of a master plan for restoration by the City of Boston. It is hoped that eventually all eighteen historic burial grounds will be inventoried. The Project's Steering Committee consists of representatives from the City of Boston's Parks and recreation Department (the entity responsible for maintenance within the burial grounds), the Boston Landmarks Commission, the Boston Art Commission, the Massachusetts Historical Commission, the Boston Preservation Alliance, and the Bostonian Society. Other organizations supporting the Project include the Yankee Intern Program, sponsored by Yankee Publishing, Inc., and administered by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, the Charlestown Preservation Society, and the South End Historical Society.

The initial survey, in 1983, focussed on completing an inventory at King's Chapel Burial Ground; a partial inventory of the Granary Burial Ground was also initiated. In 1984, inventories were completed at Granary, at the South Burial Ground in the South End of Boston, and at the Phipps Street Burial Ground in Charlestown, the subject of this report. Each inventory involves several tasks: collecting all extant background information and historical sources, including past inventories; daily fieldwork to record each gravestone's "vital statistics" onto an inventory form, and to observe conditions at the burial ground; indexing the forms for research access; and disseminating the collected data and recommendations based on observation in a report.

Completed at Phipps Street:

- a stone-by-stone inventory of all 1,500 gravestones, tombs and monuments, including illegible grave markers;

- alphabetical and chronological indexes for all the inventory forms;

- a report on conditions and recommendations; and,

- a bibliography of historical sources related to the burial ground.

Other tasks which remain to be completed include a complete photographic inventory of all the gravestones and monuments, cross-referenced to the existing forms, and, revisions to the 1901 City Engineer's map.

BACKGROUND

Charlestown's Phipps Street Burial Ground covers 76,740 square feet on a small mound bounded by Rutherford Avenue, Lawrence Street, and the Mishawum Park Housing Development. The site was chosen by the town's founding fathers some time soon after Charlestown's establishment in 1630; the exact date is unknown. Town records first refer to the burial ground in 1648, and the earliest gravestone is that of Maud Russell, dated 1652. Originally, a beach and marshy flats bordered the south and west sides of the ground. In 1656, town officials granted the marshland around the "burying hill", and cattle grazing rights on the hill itself, to Solomon Phipps and Lawrence Dowse in exchange for "twelve pounds in good merchantable wheat and pease", while reserving for town use the burial ground and the "broadway" leading to it, now existing as Phipps Street*. Years of land-filling have changed radically the area near the burial ground. To the west and south now lie the Bunker Hill Community College (on the former site of the State Prison) across six lanes of highway (Rutherford Avenue), and a vacant, rubble-strewn lot.

Topographically, the Phipps Street Burial Ground is unique, with its gravestones and monuments arranged in irregular sections and family plots. This arrangement is unlike any of Boston's other seventeenth-century burial grounds which have been reorganized over the years into more-or-less regular rows to facilitate mowing. The families' gravestones are grouped (some say) on the part of the burial ground's slope which faced the original family home and so may represent the only surviving record of Charlestown's pre-Revolutionary War street configuration, as the town was completely destroyed by a British-set fire in 1775. However, the burial ground has not remained intact over the past 200 years. During the Revolutionary War, British soldiers removed some gravestones to use as thresholds in their barracks on Bunker Hill. Later, in 1855, "paths and avenues were laid out and trees planted", which also disturbed the ancient pattern. The paths were named for prominent families in Charlestown, such as Frothingham, Hurd, Russell, Tufts, and Phipps, and provide a general indication of the location of family monument and gravestone groupings within the burial ground.

The most prominent monument in the burial ground, standing near the crest of the hill, is that of John Harvard. Alumni from Harvard University erected the fifteen foot granite obelisk to memorialize their first benefactor in 1828, nearly 200 years after his death in 1638. Harvard's original grave marker is gone, and the exact location of his grave is unknown. Other notables interred in this ground but missing grave markers include Nathaniel Gorham, a signer of the Constitution and president of the Continental Congress, and Thomas Beecher, one of the first settlers at Massachusetts Bay Colony. The gravestones at Phipps Street Burial Ground are some of the most artistically significant and finest in the Boston area. A large part were carved by local stonecutters, most notably the unidentified "Charlestown Carver", and several generations of the Lamson family.

*Frothingham.

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The Phipps Street Burial Ground is located in an out-of-the-way area, and is surrounded by an unattractive "no-man's land" of asphalt parking areas, weedy lots and barbed wire-topped fences. The single entrance gate is in need of repair, its hinges rusted and bent, with a battered sign "This is Your Park Keep It Clean." The iron fence surrounding the burial ground is only about ten years old and in good condition, although not a serious deterrent to neighborhood children. A tall, conspicuously dead elm, spray-painted graffiti, and knocked-over monuments contribute to a desolate, neglected atmosphere. The prominent Harvard obelisk is blackened from a bonfire, and has two holes where marble plaques have been removed*. A few weed trees provide minimal shade. The weed-choked empty lot adjacent to the burial ground supplies a handy source of projectiles for target practice against the gravestones. Piles of shattered glass at the base of many gravestones indicate bottles are also popular as missiles. The paths and granite stairways, constructed in the nineteenth century, are badly overgrown.

The gravestones, tombs and monuments at Phipps Street range in date from 1652 to 1907; however, over one-third date from the first half of the eighteenth century (1700-1750). Slate gravestones are the predominant form of grave memorial in the burial ground, with a few of marble sandstone, basalt or granite. The other types of memorials are: freestanding tombs, rectangular in shape, mostly constructed of sandstone or granite slabs; monuments, mainly marble or granite obelisks or other vertical shape; and wall tombs, set into the brick retaining walls around the perimeter and marked with granite, marble or slate plaques. Most of the tombs were constructed in the nineteenth century, and have been repaired or rebuilt over the years. Several obelisks and monuments have been broken or pulled over. In addition, the surfaces of all sandstone and marble memorials are eroded.

SURVEY INFORMATION

The inventory forms contain the following categories for conditions and damage assessment:

- Broken - a portion of a gravestone is no longer attached, or is missing
- Chipped - small pieces of stone are gone, usually from the edges, mostly caused by bumps from lawnmowers
- Cracked - ranges from hairline cracks to those penetrating the stone
- Discolored- the stone's surface is darkened, or an untypical color, caused by air pollution, dirt, mold growth, vandalism
- Eroded - the surface of the gravestone or monument dissolves through interaction with acidic precipitation, esp. marbles and sandstones

*see Frothingham for the original texts inscribed on these plaques.

- Overgrown - weeds or tree growth have restricted access to the stone
- Repair - a damaged stone has been repaired at some point, with or without success
- Spalled - also termed "exfoliation", the surface layer of stone, through the freeze-thaw weathering process, becomes detached and easily crumbles away
- Sunken - the gravestone has settled into the soil deeply enough to affect part or all of the inscription
- Tilted - a problem when falling over is imminent

The four damage categories broken/chipped/cracked/spalled are ranked on a scale of 1 - 5, 1 being the least and 5 the most heavily damaged. These categories were ranked to give a wider range of information on the extent of damage for decision-making purposes, as repair or protection in these cases are perhaps most essential. The sunken/tilted gravestones can be remedied easily. For the purposes of this report, the ranked categories were regrouped into two groups, with rankings 1-3 called moderate, and 4-5 called severe damage.

A general statistical survey based on the information collected this summer reveals that most damage to the gravestones is presently at a moderate rather than severe level. About 40% of all the stones are chipped or cracked moderately, with 9% affected severely, and about 30% are moderately spalled, with an additional 17% affected severely. Since the exfoliation process is a progressively worsening phenomenon, the moderately damaged gravestones are likely to become severely affected in later years. In addition, the approximately 50% of all the gravestones which are moderately and severely chipped or cracked represent damaged surfaces that are more susceptible to the exfoliation process. While there is no product that can protect a large number of stones from further weathering and accompanying damage, there are steps which can be taken to control those factors which can accelerate the deterioration process. The most obvious move is to protect the gravestones from further man-made damage. Improper maintenance techniques, such as bumping into the stones with lawnmowers, are as much of a problem as thrown bottles and rocks or other forms of vandalism. Natural hazards such as root infiltration into cracks, dead tree limbs falling onto gravestones, or soil piling up against one side and eventually breaking a gravestone in two, can be mitigated by improving maintenance. Also, fully one-quarter (25%) of the gravestones are sunken enough to hamper reading the inscription. Many of the deepest buried should be excavated, as stones can be completely covered. Tilted gravestones in danger of falling over should be reset into the ground to prevent theft or breakage. The following section of recommendations addresses these and other areas of concern within the burial ground.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The list of recommendations fall into three categories; maintenance, landscaping, and public awareness.

Maintenance:

1. More frequent lawn mowing, but use weed-eater type trimmers exclusively near the gravestones.
2. Routine tasks should include: removal of excessive weed growth, pruning of low-hanging or dead tree branches, removal of loose rocks and other throwable debris, resetting tilted or sunken stones.
3. Install a trash barrel in the vicinity, empty it frequently.
4. Repair, clean and maintain the Harvard monument.
5. Remove dead elm, leaving stump (at least two stones are embedded).

Landscaping:

1. Repair the gate, lock it at specified times.
2. Signage - forbidding gravestone rubbings, use of glass containers within the burial ground, dumping, loitering, and, describing the history and symbolism of the gravestones, other interesting information.
3. Install lighting to discourage night vandalism, perhaps gas lights to match those at the entrance.
4. Restore the nineteenth century pathways and stairs, install miniature street signs with original names from 1901 map (see the extant example at Bunker Hill Burying Ground).
5. Provide easy-to-maintain landscaping elements - "neat" trees for shade, benches for picnickers and strollers.
6. Convince the owner of the abutting vacant lots to at least clean up the debris; a neighborhood park would be ideal.

Public Awareness:

1. Suggest to local police that they no longer send kids to the burial ground to drink "harmlessly", and that they should increase patrols.
2. Involve local historical and community organizations in protection of the burial ground; for example, the adjacent Knights of Columbus building has parking lot lights that could help illuminate at night. The members may also be interested in participating in clean-up efforts.
3. Encourage school day-trips highlighting the educational aspects of gravestones as history and art.
4. Include the burial ground in tourist information about Charlestown.
5. Develop a self-guided tour with a map pamphlet pinpointing grave-stones of interest.
6. Hold Memorial Day services in the ground, restore the flagpole.

In addition, a program of broken stone and fragment retrieval should be developed to replace the most outstanding gravestones with replicas.

BIBLIOGRAPHY - Material Relating to the Phipps St. Burial Ground

Griffin, William R. J.: Epitaphs: Old Burial Hill, (Phipps St. Burial Ground)
Charlestown - 1640 to 1952; Lowell, Mass.; 1952.

The writer copied names and dates from all stones, tablets and tombs from earliest date to 1951, and used records held by the Parks Dept. since 1873. A photocopy of a typed manuscript, arranged alphabetically by last name, no locations noted. Also includes news articles from the Charlestown Saturday Chronicle for Sept. 13, 20, [27], and Oct. 4, 1873, as well as various city ordinances and public notices regarding the old graveyard. at Bos. Soc. (oversize F74 C4 G87)

Wyman, Thomas B.; Records from Inscriptions in the Old Burial Place, Charlestown, Mass., 1654-1799; 1845.

A photocopy of original manuscript in alphabetical order, with location (N,S,E,W) not ed. An original of this manuscript can be found in the Richard Frothingham Papers at the Mass. Historical Society. Same kind of work as above, limited to pre-1799 gravestones or tombs. at Bos. Soc. (oversize F74 C4 W92)

[Boston Transcript] news article, July 22, 1899.

Brief but informative history of Phipps St. Burial Ground. Bostonian Society Scrapbook Collection G12.

Map of Charlestown, by Peter Tufts, 1818.

Shows burial ground in relation to whole town, no detail. at Bos. Soc.

Plan of Old Burying Ground, 1873. Surveyed by Brown and LeBaron.

Tracing of an original, some locations noted. at New England Historic and Genealogical Society (G3764 B6 1873 B7)

Frothingham, Richard; The History of Charlestown, Mass.; Little Brown, Boston; 1845.

A comprehensive history of the town which includes several references to the burial ground, esp. pages 75-77, 94, 150.

Sawyer, Timothy; Old Charlestown; J.H. West Co., Boston; 1902.

Columns from the Charlestown Enterprise printed in book form as they appeared in the newspaper 1888-1902. General history, with details about prominent families.

Forbes, Harriette M.; "The Lamsons of Charlestown, Stone Cutters"; Old Time New England, Jan. 1927, Vol XVII, No. 3.

An examination of the generations of Lamsons accompanied by pictorial representation of some examples of their work.

In addition, all the original inventory forms, notes, and other material collected during the inventory process are available at the Bostonian Society, 15 State St., Boston, for use within the library.

Location List - Phipps Street Burial Ground

Section contains:

- A 5 wall stones, numbered 1 - 5
- B 10 wall stones, numbered 50, 50A, 51, 51A, 52, 53, 53A, 54, 55, 56
- C 7 rows, 98 gravestones
- Row 1 1, 2, 3, 4a, 4b, 4c
 - Row 2 5 - 8
 - Row 3 9 - 22
 - Row 4 23 - 41
 - Row 5 42-50, 50A, 51-63
 - Row 6 64 - 74
 - Row 7 75 - 95
- D 5 gravestones, numbered 1 - 5
- E 12 rows, 122 gravestones
- Row 1 1 - 12
 - Row 2 13-16, T16a, 17-28
 - Row 3 29 - 37
 - Row 4 38, 38a, 39-51
 - Row 5 52 - 63
 - Row 6 64 - 75
 - Row 7 76 - 85
 - Row 8 86 - 91
 - Row 9 92 - 97
 - Row 10 98 - 104
 - Row 11 105 - 114
 - Row 12 115 - 120
- F 6 rows, 84 stones
- Row 1 1 - 12
 - Row 2 13 - 33
 - Row 3 34 - 45
 - Row 4 46 - 57
 - Row 5 58 - 64
 - Row 6 65 - 84
- G 3 rows, 19 stones
- Row 1 57, 58, 59
 - Row 2 60, 61
 - Row 3 62, 63, 64, 1A, 1, 1B, 2-9
- H 7 rows, 101 stones
- Row 1 1 - 26
 - Row 2 27 - 41
 - Row 3 42 - 58
 - Row 4 59 - 70
 - Row 5 71 - 81
 - Row 6 82 - 89
 - Row 7 90 - 101
- I 5 rows, 61 stones
- Row 1 1 - 14
 - Row 2 15 - 26
 - Row 3 27 - 42
 - Row 4 43 - 47
 - Row 5 48 - 61

Section contains:

J 20 rows, 261 gravestones

Row 1	1 - 15	Row 11	163 - 171
Row 2	16 - 72	Row 12	172 - 186
Row 3	73A, 73-78	Row 13	187 - 199
Row 4	79 - 83	Row 14	200 - 209
Row 5	84 - 100	Row 15	210 - 214
Row 6	101 - 122	Row 16	215 - 220
Row 7	123 - 139	Row 17	221 - 227
Row 8	140 - 145	Row 18	228 - 237
Row 9	146 - 157	Row 19	238 - 249
Row 10	158 - 162	Row 20	250 - 260

K 10 rows, 134 stones

Row 1	1 - 10	Row 6	83 - 98
Row 2	11 - 36	Row 7	99 - 109
Row 3	37 - 58	Row 8	110 - 118
Row 4	59 - 70	Row 9	119 - 122
Row 5	71 - 82	Row 10	123 - 134

L 6 rows, 94 stones

Row 1	1 - 13
Row 2	14 - 38
Row 3	39 - 44
Row 4	45 - 70
Row 5	71 - 79
Row 6	80 - 94

M 12 rows, 123 stones

Row 1	1 - 8	Row 7	54 - 65
Row 2	9 - 18	Row 8	66 - 80
Row 3	19 - 25	Row 9	81 - 91
Row 4	26 - 34	Row 10	92 - 106
Row 5	35 - 42	Row 11	107 - 120
Row 6	43 - 53	Row 12	121 - 123

N 9 rows, 161 stones

Row 1	1 - 15	Row 6	107 - 129
Row 2	16 - 30	Row 7	130 - 140
Row 3	31 - 40	Row 8	141 - 153
Row 4	41 - 83	Row 9	154 - 161
Row 5	84 - 106		

O 6 rows, 73 stones

Row 1	1 - 11		
Row 2	12 - 21		
Row 3	22 - 30		
Row 4	31 - 35	Row 7	73 (Harvard monument)
Row 5	36 - 45		
Row 6	46 - 72		

P 8 rows, 95 stones

Row 1	1 - 10	Row 5	40 - 55
Row 2	11 - 18	Row 6	56 - 67
Row 3	19 - 32	Row 7	68 - 81
Row 4	33 - 39	Row 8	82 - 95

Section contains:

Q 7 rows, 55 gravestones

Row 1 1 - 4

Row 2 5 - 11

Row 3 12 - 17

Row 4 18 - 22

Row 5 23 - 30

Row 6 31 - 42

Row 7 43 - 55

R 1 row, 48 gravestone (perimeter wall tombs)

For a total of 1,549 gravestones, tombs, monuments and wall plaques.
"Gravestones" is used generically to include all the above markers.



